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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AG](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: EXCHANGE OF HARSH WORDS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND FRANCE
SIGN OF INCREASINGLY TENSE RELATIONSHIP

REF: ALGIERS 451

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) Algerian Foreign Minister Bedjaoui's successful April 12-13 visit to Washington, on the heels of what has been widely viewed as the French Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy's disastrous April 9-10 visit to Algiers, has underscored the dynamic nature of Algeria's growing relationship with the United States (and to a lesser extent with Russia). Both visits took place against the backdrop of a French-Algerian Friendship Treaty stalled over Algeria's insistence that France acknowledge negative aspects of its colonizing role. The tone of the exchanges over France's colonizing role reached a low point during President Bouteflika's April 16 visit to Constantine, where he denounced France's "genocide of (Algerian) identity." And Douste-Blazy compounded tensions by lecturing that relations should be based on the future, not rancor, and by suggesting that the "horror" of the French occupation was limited to the period of the initial conquest (i.e. 1830). The official Algerian government daily El Moudjahid declined to respond directly to Douste-Blazy's criticism of Bouteflika's remarks but instead showcased positive articles on both U.S. and Russian relations. The rest of the Algerian press has joined in highlighting the growing gap between Russian/U.S. relations with Algeria and those of France and the EU.

¶2. (C) At the same time, the press has noted the irony and inconsistency of Bouteflika's traveling to France, only four days after his genocide remarks, for a post-operative medical checkup. Reflecting a sense that the rhetoric and tensions had gone too far, Bouteflika quietly sent his Diplomatic Adviser Rahal, post-independent Algeria's first ambassador to France, as a special envoy to begin to calm the waters. Given both sides' inextricable web of interests and ties, we expect current tensions and rhetoric will dissipate and work on the Friendship Treaty will eventually resume. But for now, emotions are too raw and it will take some time before any real progress can be made, especially as long as Douste-Blazy, one of the authors of the infamous French law praising colonialism's "positive" contributions, remains a lightning rod for criticism. (End Summary and Comment.)

FRANCE'S PAST ROLE KEY TO FRIENDSHIP TREATY

¶3. (SBU) Relations between France and Algeria have become increasingly tense over recent weeks, and publicly reported diplomatic exchanges have become harsher in tone. Over several months, the French and Algerian governments have worked to conclude a Friendship Treaty, whose finalization requires surmounting the hurdle of the French colonial period. Ever since the French Parliament passed last year a non-binding resolution touting French colonialism's positive contribution in Algeria, there has been a slowly building sense of outrage as well as escalating demands for a French apology that produced an impasse. As the Friendship Treaty has gone, so has the relationship. French FM Philippe Douste-Blazy's April 9-10 visit to Algiers, designed to reinvigorate work on the Algerian-French Friendship Treaty, instead was widely viewed as a "fiasco", in part because FM Bedjaoui, at a joint press conference, bluntly said many differences remained and the French political class was simply not ready to turn the page on history and apologize for France's actions. FM Bedjaoui's April 12-14 visit to the U.S., where he noted that ties with France were stalled and that "France did not have the same weight as the U.S. in Algeria," reinforced the contrasting images of French-Algerian disarray and expanding Algeria-U.S. ties. Diplomats and the press also had a field day contrasting the presentation of our 1795 treaty with Algeria with France's inability to conclude such a treaty even now.

BOUTEFLIKA DENOUNCES "GENOCIDE," AND
FRANCE CALLS FOR SOFTENING OF RHETORIC

¶4. (U) France's refusal to apologize for its colonial stewardship of Algeria, apart from giving the Algerian

political class a platform for unabashed grandstanding, has genuinely angered average Algerians. Days after Bedjaoui's perhaps overly frank assessment of French influence in Algeria, President Bouteflika denounced "the genocide of (Algerian) identity," during the French colonial period. Douste-Blazy, one of the authors of the controversial 2005 legislation, provoked further indignation in an April 19 interview, in which he lectured that policy must be built on the future, not rancor, and that in any case the "horrors" of the French occupation were confined to the period of the actual conquest (i.e., 1830!).

RUSSIA AND U.S. RELATIONS JUXTAPOSED TO THOSE WITH FRANCE

¶5. (U) The April 20 issue of El Moudjahid, the official government daily, did not respond directly to Douste-Blazy's remarks but provided a response all the same under the headline, "Rise in Power of Relations," referring to the Algerian-U.S. relationship. The article pointed to increasing military cooperation and the U.S.-Algerian common enemy of terrorism and pointedly noted that "the United States recognized ... (the Algerian counter-terrorism) experience, which is instructive to the world." The article concludes, "It is under the spirit of beneficial cooperation for both partners in all domains where common interests have been identified that American officials make official visits to construct cooperative and multi-dimensional relations." Below the U.S. article was another highlighting growing cooperation between Algeria and Russia. Press commentaries in recent days have emphasized that Algeria's relations with both the U.S. and Russia are outpacing the progress of relations with the European Union and its members.

ERDMAN